

Bush Signs Child Health-Care Extension Into Law

Insurance Program Is Funded Through March 2009, Without Expansion Democrats Sought

By Ben Feller - Associated Press - December 30, 2007

CRAWFORD, Tex.-- President Bush signed legislation on Saturday that extends a popular children's health insurance program after having twice beaten back attempts to expand it.

The extension of the State Children's Health Insurance Program is expected to provide states with enough money to cover those enrolled through March 2009. Bush and some Republican lawmakers say the program will serve those that it should: children from families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private insurance.

"We're pleased that the program will be extended and that states can be certain of their funding," White House spokesman Tony Fratto said.

Many Democrats, with help from some Republicans, wanted to give the program a significant cash infusion and broaden coverage to an estimated 4 million more children.

They overwhelmingly supported a tobacco tax increase to pay for the expansion.

The matter came to dominate legislative debate and further sour relations between the Democratic leadership and Bush this year.

The Democratic-pushed bills would have expanded the program by \$35 billion. Bush said the proposals did not put the neediest children first.

He opposed the tax increase and, more broadly, fought against what he saw as a movement toward more government health-care coverage.

The joint federal-state program provides benefits to about 6 million people, mostly children. Democratic lawmakers still want to expand enrollment and are negotiating with some Republican leaders for another try.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Saturday that Democrats won't stop "until 10 million children receive the health-care coverage they deserve."